



News Release

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Utah Takes a Tumble in Health Rankings *State falls to 7th in United Health Foundation (UHF) report*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Utah slipped from 2nd to 7th in the 21st annual *America's Health Rankings*TM report. While the drop is discouraging, it's also a reminder that keeping Utahns healthy is a never-ending challenge.

The lower ranking can be traced to several key factors, most notably an increase in the percentage of children in poverty (8.8 percent in 2009 to 13.9 percent in 2010).

However, Utah still receives high marks for low smoking, binge drinking and preventable hospitalization rates in the Foundation's 21st annual report.

"The UHF report is an important public health tool that helps us evaluate our progress in many areas," said Dr. David Sundwall, Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Executive Director. "While it puts the spotlight on our state's strengths, it reinforces some things we already knew and highlights areas where we need to improve."

Other low marks were seen in the rate of premature deaths, which dropped Utah from 7th to 13th place, and in immunization coverage, with the state falling from 21st to 30th.

"Some Utahns still believe we don't have a problem with diseases like measles and whooping cough, which are preventable by simply vaccinating our children," said Sundwall. "But the fact is, every year we have cases of vaccine-preventable illnesses and children do suffer. So we never let up in our efforts to educate parents about the benefits of immunizations."

Utah also saw a jump in adult obesity rates. “We already knew obesity was a growing problem in Utah and the report backs that up,” said Sundwall. The 2010 rankings have Utah moving from 5th to 9th place, with 24 percent of Utahns now considered obese.

The UHF report also cites the state’s high geographic disparity and low public health funding at \$65 per person. In addition, Utah’s continuing shortage of primary care physicians places the state in 45th position for that measure.

“As I predicted last year, our national ranking is suffering from our serious lack of physicians, both primary care and specialists,” said Sundwall. “It can take months for Utahns to get in to see a rheumatologist or many other specialty practitioners,” he added.

Utah did fare better in other areas, and ranks in the top 10 in 10 of the report’s 22 determinants, including;

Prevalence of smoking	1 st (no change from 2009)
Infant mortality	3 rd (down from 1 st)
Cancer deaths	1 st (no change)
Prevalence of binge drinking	1 st (no change)
Children in poverty	8 th (down from 2 nd)
Preventable hospitalizations	2 nd (no change)
Cardiovascular deaths	3 rd (no change)
Prevalence of obesity	9 th (down from 5 th)
Violent crime	6 th (no change)
Infectious diseases	6 th (no change)

The report ranked Vermont as the healthiest state in the nation. Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Hawaii round out the top five. To see the full report, visit <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.